

A
VINDICATION
OF THE
STAGE,

With the Usefulness and Advantages
OF
Dramatick Representations,

In Answer to

Mr. COLLIER's

Late BOOK, Entituled,

A View of the Prophaness and Immorality, &c.

In a Letter to a Friend.

Aut Prodesse volunt, aut Delectare Poetae.

*Delectant homines, mihi crede, ludi, non eos solum, qui fa-
rentur; sed illos etiam qui Dissimulant. Cicero.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for. Joseph Wild, at the Sign of the Elephant at
Charing-Cross, M DC XCVIII.

WINDICATON

THE

OF THE

MR. COLLIER

A View of the Prophecy and Ministry of

Believers in the Kingdom of God

Printed for Joseph H. at the sign of the Elephant in
CHANCERY LANE, MDCCLXXVII

A
VINDICATION
 Of the
STAGE, &c.

S I R,

I Return you my thanks for the Present you sent me of Mr. Collier's Book against the Stage, you cou'd indeed have thought of nothing wou'd have pleas'd me better; it made a mighty Noise with us in *Staffordshire*, his Arguments were cry'd up as Invincible, and all the precise old Folks here (who perhaps had never seen a Play in their lives) join'd in a loud Out-cry against the wicked Stage: To shew you my Gratitude, and to encourage you still to remember your Friend at this distance, I have sent you some Thoughts as they occur'd on a slight perusal of it; for let the old Maxim be never so common in our Mouths, *viz. Vertue is its own Reward*; yet we always find, where it meets with no other, it is very apt to die and wither, like a Plant in a dry Soil it is seldom seen gay and flourishing without the assistance of some kind and refreshing Showers; and I believe we need go no farther for an Instance of this Nature, than to Mr. Collier himself, for I am strangely apt to fancy that the *Fifty Pounds* had a greater influence with him, than the stab

he suppos'd he shou'd give to Vice and Debauchery ; this however I must confess a course Complement, but you know ~~my free humour~~, and have reason to except your self out of the general Rule. If I stay longer here, I may send you these Thoughts ~~better~~ digested, or some farther Remarks on the same Author.

Mr. Collier has employ'd abundance of Rhetorick in his Cause, he has made use of all his Judgment in digesting his Matter, and shew'd his great Reading in his Quotations from the Greek and Latine Poets, and the Ancient Fathers; with great skill in the choice of his Arguments, and given them so bright and dazling a lustre, that it is no wonder if many heedless and unobserving Readers are carried over to embrace his Party: But I think there is not really that strength in them as is fancied, which I shall endeavour, as well as I can, to show, under the disadvantage of but an indifferent Memory, and the want of all manner of assistance from Books; nay, I cannot so much as procure those Plays he so severely condemns.

In his Introduction he tells us, *The business of the Stage is to recommend Vertue, and discourage Vice.* Now whether or no Plays (Comedies I mean) have any business at all, or whether their chief and prime business is not to divert the Audience, and relieve the Mind fatigu'd with the business of the foregoing part of the day, is yet a disputable point: Nor shall I easily grant his Proposition. For my part, when I go to the Theatres, it is with this intention alone, viz. to unbend my Thoughts from all manner of business, and by this Relaxation to raise again my wearied Spirits, and fit them for the Affairs of the next day; the Mirth and Jollity of the place, like a well prescrib'd Cordial, performs its Operation, enlivens my drooping Thoughts, and passes clearly off, working a pleasing Cure, and leaving no impression behind it: This is my Opinion of Comedy, and not only mine, but

but also of several very Famous and Learned Persons; however there are but few of our Comedies that will not afford some Moral Instructions too; and our Tragedies may stand the test, even by his Rule, with any of the Ancients.

His chief Objections against our Plays are, That they are Immodest, Prophane, and Immoral; and that the Sacred Order of the Clergy is abus'd and ill treated; I shall endeavour to say something on each of these Heads.

First, He tells us they are Immodest, and generally Smutty. I shall give him an answer from the Celebrated Sir *Philip Sidney*, *Comedy* (saith he) *is an Imitation of the Common Errors of Life*; now as in *Geometry* the *Oblique* must be known, as well as the *Right*; and in *Arithmetick* the *Odd* as well as the *Even*, so in the *Actions of our Life* who seeth not the filthiness of *Evil*, wanteth a great *Foil* to perceive the *Beauty of Virtue*; and little *Reason* hath any *Man* to say that men learn the *Evil* by seeing it so set out, since there is no *Man* living, but by the force *Truth* hath in *Nature*, no sooner seeth these *Men* play their *Parts* but he wisheth them in *Pristinum*. And *Cicero* tells us, *Comedia est Imitatio vitæ*, where every one might see himself hit in some part or other. So that I know not how they can avoid giving *Descriptions of Debauchery*, till the *World* has left the *Practise* of it; when *Men* no longer *Swear*, you will hear no *Oaths* in the *Play-house*, and so of all other *Vices*. Besides, if *Delight* be the end of *Comedy*, the *Charge* will fall on the *People*, and not on the *Poets*, so that at least *Mr. Collier* has laid his *Arguments* wrong, for if the *Spectators* were displeas'd with the *Representation*, the *Poets* wou'd quickly change it. This, granting his *Charge* were true, but *Mr. Collier* perhaps may fancy a bad meaning where there is none, this heavy *Condemnation* may be only a *Bugbear* of his own raising, to fright away the fairest and best *Part* of the *Audience*, I mean the *Ladies*. How has it happen'd that he has made
such

such Discoveries? When others, as clear-sighted as himself, nay, and as modest too, never found any such faults. Further, his dwelling so long on the Subject of Debauchery, argues something of Delight and Pleasure in the Case. It puts me in mind of a Custom common among the Native *Irish*, which is, that they cannot endure to go dry in their Feet, but when they Travel, run into every Puddle they find, and are very angry, if for want of a Bog or Ditch they are forc'd to be cleanly, tho' ne'er so short a time. Mr. *Collier* may apply the Story at his leisure.

And here I can't but think the Ladies have great cause to thank him for his kind Instructions; they, harmless Innocents, found nothing amiss before, but Mr. *Collier* has taken care they shall not be so ignorant hereafter; for he, in his great Wisdom, has pointed out the places, where he promises they may be furnished with Smut in abundance.

His way of Complementing them on this account, is something odd; but that's not to be regarded in him. He well knows, that several of those Plays he Condemns, are immediately Dedicated to Ladies of the Highest Quality, and almost all of them have gain'd the Approbation of the Fair Sex: Now, by his pretending to find these faults of Smuttiness and Obscenity, he very boldly asserts, that they encourage and are pleas'd with the Crimes; this every one must own is very Obliging, Civil, and Well-bred.

But perhaps, to excuse himself he will say, that the Ladies did not observe any ill in what they encourag'd, and that if they had, they wou'd have shew'd their dislike of it. But this he shall answer himself in Page 11. where speaking of Womens Modesty, he tells us, *It is wrought in the Mechanism of their Bodies, that intuitive Knowledge scarce makes a quicker Impression: And that the Enemy no sooner approaches, but the Blood rises in opposition, and looks Defiance to an Indecency.* So that if there had been the Enemy which he

he pretends, the Ladies wou'd have found it out without his interposing in the business, and if there was no Enemy, we must imagine him a little Ally'd to *Quixotism*, or troubled with something like a Wind Mill in his Brains, that for the sake of Quarrelling only, he will Combat with the Air. But the Ladies have not found this Enemy, therefore we must think his needless Assistance Impertinence, and his Charge vain and frivolous: He was willing however to show his Skill and Dexterity in the vile Employment of raking among Filth and Dirt. Further, it is an unlucky Blot to his Prudence, in disturbing and bringing to light what was so well hid before, when he himself seems aware of the dangerous Consequences it may produce if it wore a *Disguise*, as he says Page 4th, he was very much to blame for taking it off. You shall have his own Words Page 5. *For such a Libera- may probably raise those Passions, which can neither be discharg'd without Trouble, nor satisf'd without a Crime; 'tis not safe for a Man to trust his Vertue too far, for fear it should give him the slip.* It seems he did not take his own Advice in this particular: For, we find he trusted his Vertue very far, tho' not too far I hope, for fear of the worst. In Page 7. he tells us, *it is almost a fault for them* (meaning the Fair Sex) *to understand they are ill us'd*; I would ask Mr. Collier if he then doth not commit a fault too, who shews them they are ill us'd? Nay, perhaps wou'd engage them into a belief they are ill us'd, when they are not. Thus much for the Moderns.

Now he proceeds to quote all the exceptionable places under this Head, that are to be found among the Ancients; but, by his favour, there are several other places may be produc'd, which he has either forgot or skip'd over; I shall instance in two only at present; one Example of this kind shall be the Scenes betwixt the Nurse and *Phedra* in *Euripides*, and there I think we may meet with as home strokes of

of Obscenity, and as pithy arguing on the Subject, as can be found among the Moderns. It will be but a lame excuse, to say it is the *Nurse*, and not *Phedra* the Lady, speaks the faulty Sentences, for if the Audience have them, the matter is not much by whom they are convey'd: They will make as deep an Impression, and find as ready Entertainment from the *Nurse* (who by the way was rather her Companion and Confidant) as from *Phedra* her self.

The other shall be from the *Phedra* of *Seneca*, and here we find the Lady her self openly owning and justifying her Incestuous Love, and the *Nurse* advising the contrary; nay, we have both *Lady* and *Nurse* praying to the Gods to assist in the wicked design on her Son-in-law, and using all imaginable means to bring the business about; the *Nurse* falls briskly upon him, tells him a City-Life with Women is very comfortable and delightful; but he is deaf to the Charm, professes a mortal hatred for Women, and expresses his Love to range the Country Plains; *Phedra* falls in to the Conference, and Swounds at his Indifference, but being taken up in his Arms, she recovers, and argues very hotly and shamefully for her Passion; but the Youth still resisting, she will needs Ravish him; (*Etiam in Amplexus ruit*) all this is openly shew'd on the Stage. I defie Mr. *Collier* to produce me one such Obscene Instance in all our *English* Plays.

It will not be much amiss neither to put Mr. *Collier* in mind of the *Ludi Florales*, which were Anually Celebrated among the *Romans*, for tho' they were not Stage-Plays, yet they will serve to show that we are, contrary to his Opinion, something Modester than they. They owed their Original to a Famous Whore, who having got an Estate by her Trade, left the Commonwealth her Heir, on this Condition, That every Year they shou'd Celebrate her Birth-day with Publick Sports; and the Solemnity consisted in a Company of Lewd Strumpets, that ran about the City naked, Singing, Dancing,

Dancing, and using the most Obscene and Lascivious Postures: And this was done by Publick Order and Command. This I think is sufficient to let us see, that contrary to Mr. Collier's Opinion, the Ancients were as Immodest and Obscene as the Moderns, if not worse: But we will look into his Book, to see if he does not contradict himself in the Matter.

And indeed I cannot forbear smiling, to see this Gentleman take such Labour and Pains in three or four whole Pages, to prove that the Ancient Poets were not guilty of this Crime of Smuttiness and Obscenity; when but a little before in Page 5. he told us, *it was for this very Reason that Plato banish'd Poets his Commonwealth.* Now I hope Mr. Collier will not be so very hardy as to say, That *Plato's* Acquaintance lay among the Moderns. This was a very unlucky Sentence, and his forgetting it, is a great proof of the old Proverb, *Great Wits have short Memories.* And since we have occasionally mention'd *Plato*, it will not be wholly impertinent to let you see that honest *Plato* himself, tho' one of their Grave Philosophers, writ Verses more Lewd and Scandalous, than the very worst that can be found among our Poets. They were writ on the Kissing of *Agathe*, and done from the Greek by *Decimus Laberius*.

*Dum Semihulco Savio,
Meumq; Puellum Savior
Dulcemq; Florem Spiritus,
Duco ex aperto tramite:
Anima tunc Agra & saucia,
Cucurrit ad Labia Mihi;*

B

Ricumq;

*Rictumq; in ore pervium;
 Et Labra pueri Mollia
 Rimati itineri Transitus;
 Ut Transiliret Nititur.
 Tum si, moræ quid pluscula;
 Fuiſſet in Coitu Oscula
 Amoris Igni percita;
 Tranſiſſet, & me linqueret.
 Et mira prorsum res foret,
 Ut ad me fierem Mortuus
 Ad puerum ut intus viverem.*

And if a Bearded Philosopher, that pretended to a remarkable Strictness and Severity of Life, writ so Lewd and Loosely, we may well imagine their Poets were not behind hand in the Matter.

Well, but he tells us Page 5. *That we may take notice the Ancients had no Smutty Songs in their Plays.* This I must confess is an extraordinary Observation, but I am afraid it will slip away from him before he is aware. I wou'd fain know what grounds he has for it; is it Because he finds none Printed with their Plays? Now I will offer this in Answer, that it is very likely the *Dramatick Poet* never meddled with the Musical Entertainment, but that either the Masters of Musick were so much Poets as to make their own Words, or some other of an Inferior Class were hired to the purpose; and it is very probable, that the *Musick* and the *Dramma* were reckon'd so different, that the *Drammatick Writer* thought himself

himself not oblig'd to take any care of it; and this perhaps may be the best Reason can be given; why we find none of their Musical Entertainments among the *Latin Comedies*, after the *Chorus* was expell'd the Stage: But this is not all neither, we have, I fancy, all the Reason in the World, to believe they rather went beyond us in this particlular; for we are sure, and Mr. Collier himself confesses it, that the *Pantomimi*, the *Gestures* and *Dancing* were extreemly Lewd and Scandalous; and that their Musick must be conformable to the Occasion, none I believe will doubt, nor do I think we have any great Reason to question that they wanted Vocal Musick to joyn with the Instrumental. Thus have I done, what my haste, and the disadvantages I labour under, will permit on this Head; and I think have sufficiently prov'd that the *Ancients* were as Smutty and Obscene as any of the *Moderns* can be; not but that I own there are some things however might be regulated on the *English Stage*, and I wish with all my Heart all Indecencies were remov'd, for there cannot be a more Effectual and Noble Method of instructing us, than by *Drammatick Representation*; but of this more hereafter. I shall pass to his next Charge, that of *Prophaness*.

And under this Head, he Charges them with using Oaths in their Plays; yet produces no Instances to prove his Assertion; therefore we may very well conclude it false and frivolous, for had it been true, his Wit or his Malice had found it out; and he, who has taken all manner of advantages against them upon all accounts, and has rais'd Mountains out of every Mole-hill, wou'd never have overlook'd such an opportunity of Triumph.

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Mr.

Mr. Collier was very hardly distress'd to make good this Charge, since he was forc'd to complain of a Word, because it happen'd to have two Letters that do indeed belong to an Oath, but perhaps this Gentleman's Aversion to Oaths is so very great, that the sight of the Word scar'd him; and so without further consideration he condemn'd it. Aversions often cause very unaccountable Effects. I remember a Story of Sir William Temple's, of one, Who in his Youth being very closely pursued by a Madman, had but just time to shut the Door of a House he ran into, before his Pursuer was at it; and the Impression stuck so fast upon him ever after, that when he was a Man, he never enter'd a Door but with fear on his Spirits, and cou'd not forbear turning his Head back as he enter'd. This Squeamish Gentleman perhaps has had some such terrible Fright, which he can never wear off. One Comfort is, if Oaths do happen in his way, he very well knows how to refuse them.

But perhaps in some very few places an Oath may be met with, and it may be necessary too, for I desire Mr. Collier to shew us how a *Libertine*, a *Debauchee*, can be represented, but by making him act and speak accordingly.

It is *Horace's* Rule,
Sit Medea ferox invictaq; flebilis Ixo,
Perfidus Ixion, Io vaga, Tristis Orestes.

Every one must be represented as they are: He may as well complain of a Painter for drawing an ugly Face like, as of a Poet for making a Wicked Person Swear and talk Lewdly, a Loose Behaviour is as Essential to describe

scribe the one, as a Bad Complexion and Irregular Features are to delineate the other.

It is very observable, that upon this Head, he has not endeavour'd any Parrallel betwixt the Ancients and the Moderns; he cannot but very well know it wou'd have been extreamly to his disadvantage, for nothing was more common among them, than to use their Deities upon the flightest occasion. By *Jupiter*, by *Hercules*, &c. were almost continually in the Mouths of their Vertuous Characters. No Speech was spoke but was accompany'd by one of their Gods. This I hope no one will mistake for an Authority for that abominable Sin; it is only to show Mr. *Collier*, his Cause is here entirely lost. And so I shall proceed to the next thing he Charges our Poets with, viz. their using Scripture Phrases in their Plays.

And how they can avoid it I know not, unless this Critical Gentleman will make a New Language, and a New Alphabet for them; if he will promise to do this, I will engage in the Name of all the Poets, that there shall not be any Scripture Expression us'd in Poetry. And to show, that this is not so heinous as Mr. *Collier* Represents it; I shall offer these Considerations.

First, That the Translation of the *Holy Bible* being done so lately, there are contained in it the Phrases and Idiom now in present use.

Secondly, The Sacred Scripture having such excellent variety of Matter, and being so admirably adapted to all Estates and Conditions of Life, it contains all the different Phrases that can be met with in the *English* Tongue.

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This being so, I can scarce find it possible for a Poet to avoid the same manner of Expression with the Translators of the Holy Scriptures. Mr. Collier may as well forbid all of his Order to Preach, because they must of necessity make use of some Phrases, that have been us'd before to an ill purpose. To make this plainer I will only desire Mr. Collier to compare those places of their Plays which he quotes, with the Text of a Bible of an old Translation, and he will find a very wide difference both in Words and Sense. I suppose he will not deny the old Translation to be Scripture. Besides, how can he be positive he hits the true meaning of the Poet? Words may be wrested to a quite contrary Sense of their Author, and that made to appear ill in a Quotation, which is not so of it self. How can he be sure that Mr. Congreve intended to ridicule Religion, when he made *Valentine* in his Madness say *he was Truth*? 'Tis very probable Mr. Congreve intended no such matter; and if he did not, Mr. Collier is guilty of Falshood and Slander. The Heathen *Epictetus* can teach him more Charity, if the Bible cannot; he will tell him *That there are two handles for every thing, and that we ought to take hold of the best*; we should always Judge favourably, and not put the worst Construction on things that they'll bear. But Mr. Collier is so much us'd to Private and Shrewd Meanings himself, that he imagines so of every one else, his very finding fault with others, betrays something of guilt in himself; and because he shall not complain that he is ill and uncharitably dealt with in this Censure, I shall give one Instance from many, to make good my Assertion. It is in the first Vol. of his *Essays*, Page 120. in his Chap. of the Aspect. There he says, *Whether the Honesty and Dishonesty are discernable in the Face, is a Question which admits of Dispute.* King Charles
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the Second thought he could depend upon these Observations: But, with submission, I believe an instance might be given, in which his Rules of Physiognomy fail'd. Now I fancy Mr. Collier had some shrewd meaning in this particular Instance, and I think he cannot complain of hard usage, if we believe we find this meaning in the 295th Page of Sir William Temple's *Memoires*: For considering the Man and his Principles, it is more than probable our Supposition is right. And I think this is a meaning which he deserves to be call'd to Account for; those of his Party think it is sufficient if they express themselves obscurely enough to escape the lash of the Law; and have the impudence to write the most scandalous Libels on their Superiors, under the shelter of a Double Meaning; it wou'd be but just if their Obscurities and Double Meanings were narrowly inspect'd, and themselves made to smart for the Liberty they have taken. Mr. Collier may make a great Buffle, and say this is hard usage; but let him learn better Manners for the future.

Further, supposing our Plays may have that Prophe-
 nesis in them which he pretends, yet let him remember
 that Plays are the Glasses of Human Actions, and re-
 flect the true Images of the People; as you see the Er-
 rors of your Complexion by a view in a Glass, so in
 the Play-House you see the meanness and folly of your
 Vices, and by beholding the frightful Image, you grow
 ashamed, and perhaps may Reform; whereas had they ne-
 ver been expos'd, they had still been your Darling Com-
 panions, tho' all the Pulpits in Town had thunder'd
 never so loudly against them. For as the Divine Herbert
 says,

*A Verse may find him who a Sermon flies,
 And turn Delight into a Sacrifice.*

But

But now he proceeds to show how the Ancients us'd their Religion, and here he is forc'd to confess, against his will, That they almost equal'd the Moderns; but I say positively, they surpass'd us here too, and out-did, whatever he, with all his straining can pretend to alledge against our Poets. *Aristophanes* he has himself mark'd for a down-right Atheist, one, that brought the Deities to be publickly Ridicul'd upon the Stage; Nor do we find they had much better Treatment in their most solemn Tragedies. In several places of *Æschylus*, they, and Religion too, are far from being decently Treated. Nay, *Euripides*, who is the most Grave and Moral of all the Ancients both *Greeks* and *Latins*, was once Condemned, and had like to have Suffered Death for his Irreverent and Irreligious Treatment of the Gods. And *Sophocles*, who is called the Prince of Tragick Poets, makes often times mad work with the Deities: You see them scuffle and fall together by the Ears like a Rabble or a confus'd Multitude, upon none, or very ridiculous occasions. Nor is *Homer* himself in his *Epick Poem* free from these Indecencies, witness the Dissentions and Tumults of the Deities; some siding with the *Greeks*, others with the *Trojans*, and each hurrying about in the Service of the Party they had Espous'd. Among the *Latins*, the Neat and Correct *Terence* has given several Bold, and Exceptionable strokes about Religion: and I am very sure he will not be able to defend *Plautus* from the Objection, who often uses the Gods very courstly, witness the Prologue to *Amphitryon*, where he makes *Mercury* talk in Puns and Quibbles to the Audience, and the same Comical Character he wears throughout the Play. *Jupiter* himself is Represented Lewd and an Adulterer; *Arcturus* another of the Deities speaks the Prologue to his *Rudens*,
and

and *Neptune*, one of their Principal Gods, suffers many a hard Banter in the Play. *Seneca* in his Tragedies often falls foul on the Gods, Providence, and Religion. I think the very worst he can pretend of our Modern Poets, is nothing compar'd with the Boldness the Ancients have taken on this Head. Nor is it a sufficient Excuse to say they were Heathens, and therefore cannot be suppos'd to be so strict as Christians ought to be; nor that *it is no wonder to find them run Riot upon this Subject*; for these were the Gods they pray'd to in their Adversity, and from whom they expected Relief and Help; they Confided in them, and Consecrated Temples to their Honour, Sung Hymns in Praise of their Goodness, and dreaded their Wrath: So that of Consequence they might have expected better usage from their Adorers. But I shall proceed to what he says of the Clergy.

And here he is very Copious indeed, and spends abundance of pains, to show what Venerable Thoughts the Ancients had of their Priests; and I think to very little purpose, for I believe the People of *England* (not excepting the Poets) have as high a Veneration for the Sacred Order as any Nation in the World have, or ever had: Let us observe a little how they are respected in other Countries.

In *France* we shall find them just as much Slaves to the Despotick Wills of their Princes, as the meanest Peasant of their Dominions; they must square their Doctrine to the Relish and Palate of the Court, or they are sure to smart for their Neglect. In *Holland* we find their Preachers are paid their Salaries by the State, which practise I suppose was founded upon the Observation of the many Disorders, and Tumults, have been rais'd and fomented in other Countries by the Ambition, or some other Passion
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of Priests. In *Italy* and *Spain* we find the Clergy living at their Ease, in the midst of Pomp and Riches, and very often taking as deep draughts of Luxury and Worldly Vanities, as the grossest Instance of Heathen Lewdness can afford. And tho' they pretend to exact an implicit Faith from the ignorant Laity, yet all that have been in those Countries assure us, That their Priests are look'd upon but as Hypocrites and Scandalous Persons; nor will the meanest Person stick at vilifying and ridiculing the Clergy, when they can do it safely. How often have we seen the Pope's Bulls and Orders tore and despis'd by Princes of their own Communion? And his Legates Imprison'd or Expell'd their Dominions. I speak not this to encourage any Contempt of the Sacred Order, for it ought, I think, to be treated with all imaginable Respect and Reverence, especially by us here in *England*, who are blest with the Soberest, and Gravest, as well as the most Learned Clergy of the whole World. We very rarely, if ever, meet with those Enormities and Disorders among the Clergy of *England*, which are so frequently seen amongst those of Foreign Countries. And here I cannot but by the way observe, That the Tumults and Civil War in *Poland* have no other source but the Ambition and Obstinate Humour of a Priest. And the Blood of some Hundreds of Innocent People have been Sacrificed to his Pride and Willfulness. Now this very Instance being so full in the Eye of the whole World, it is no wonder if some Considering Observers exclaim, and lash out into Satyr upon the Occasion. Who can forbear? Nay, Mr. *Collier* himself, and all others of his Principles, are more bitter and sharp Invectives against the Order, by their Refractory and Obstinate Separation from the Greatest and most Pious Part of their Brethren, than any can be writ by the most

most Atheistical Pen; and wound it more severely. To let this pass. Mr. Collier himself owns *Oedipus* in *Sophocles*, to Reproach and Reflect on *Tiresias* the Priest, but to extenuate the matter, says, it is only on his Person, not his Function, those sharp Strokes are bestow'd; and pray what do the *English* Poets do more? All their Reflections are, I really believe, intended for no other Design, but to hurt those that deserve them: The Satyr therefore is Innocent, and those may thank themselves it hits. The great stir Mr. Collier makes on this Head, gives great cause to suspect, he is more than ordinarily concern'd in the Matter. *The more Clamour, the more Guilt*, has always prov'd a true Observation. He keeps a wondrous bustle by a Quotation from *Tully*, and Observations from several Nations, to prove the Clergy as fit to be at the Head of Temporal as Spiritual Affairs; but here I think he is beside his Byas; if we consider the wide difference there is between them, we need go no farther to confute the Ambitious Gentleman. Mr. Collier hopes *what he has offered on this Head will not be misunderstood*; he assures us *there is no Vanity in the Case*. No squinting towards himself in the Matter. Now I can't suppose there is, how shou'd, what is spoke of the Clergy, any way relate to a Spruce Gentleman, a *Beau* with a Long Wig, Silk Waistcoat, and Sword by his Side. For my part I think they are two very different Persons. We will now examin his next Charge, which is their Immorality, their making *Debauchees* their top Characters and Rewarding them in the end.

And upon this Head, this Critical Gentleman is very severe, tho' if Delight be the chief end of Comedy, as I think no one need to question, the business will be found to bear much harder upon those of his own Or-

der than upon the Poets : For, the Poet's business being to please his Audience, he must Study their Humours and Fancies, and not his own; for, tho' the *Dramma* be never so regularly writ, yet every thing Represented, will seem Nauseous and Insipid, unless it is Conformable to the Sentiments and Relish of the Spectators. Whatever Poet follows not this Rule exactly, will quickly be sensible of his Error, by his bad Harvest of Fame and Profit. And if the Audience will not be pleas'd with any thing but Immorality, &c. pray why have not the Clergy, whose business it is to Instruct the People, taught them better? Which if they had, they wou'd have found the Poets to have follow'd the steps of their Audience. So that we see it is rather the Clergy's Fault than the Poet's Crime, that our *Drammas* are Irregular on this Head. And Mr. Collier has laid his Argument just wrong, for if the World be good, Plays wou'd be good also; but if the World be bad, Plays will be bad too: And I am sure the Ancients were fully as Guilty, if not more Criminal on this Account. In *Sophocles* and *Aristophanes*, we may find several Instances of Vice Rewarded and Escaping Unpunished. In almost every Play of *Terence* we may see Vice Rewarded: *Chærea* is made happy in the *Eunuch* after having Debauch'd a Virgin, and he generally does the same in all his Plays; nay, you will not only see Profligate Lewd Sparks enjoy their their Mistresses, but the Common Courtezans themselves Rewarded and Honoured. *Plautus* will afford several Examples to our purpose, However, granting we do sometimes see on our Theatres Instances of Vice Rewarded, or at least unpunish'd, yet it ought not to be an Argument against the Art, any more than the Extravagancies and Ill Practises of some in Orders can be against the whole Body of the Clergy. And here

I cannot but call to mind a Sentence I have somewhere met with, *That much of ill Nature, and a very little Judgment, go far in finding the faults of others.* How nearly this may affect Mr. Collier I leave himself to consider: But I shall say no more on this Head; nor shall I follow him in his Reflections on *Amphytrion*, *Don Quixot*, and the *Relapse*, but leave him to the handling of the Gentleman who are more nearly concern'd. I shall consider his Quotations from the Fathers, which he Levels against all manner of Stage-Plays. I thought the Learned Mr. Collier cou'd not have been so mistaken in the Matter, for let him consider that these Fathers liv'd in Heathen Times, and several of them under *Pagan Princes*, by whom Idolatry, and all manner of Vice, was not only tolerated, but openly Encourag'd on the Stage. We need not wonder at the bitter Invectives we find dispers'd in their Writings against those Devilish Representations: the wicked Shows of their Gladiators, and Women often times fighting Naked in their Theatres, were a just Cause for the Indignation of those Zealous and Good Men; and deserv'd their severest Reproof. But all those Wickednesses are Banish'd our Stage, so that I cannot see how Mr. Collier cou'd apply them to his purpose, but they might serve his Vanity tho' not his Cause, the World was to be acquainted with his Familiarity with the Learned Ancients, and some Credit might be gain'd by the Company he kept, But it may happen contrary to his Expectations, his Mistake in the Matter may go near to frustrate his Hopes. For when the Matter requires Testimonies against Tragedies and Comedies, he presently brings in places of Fathers against the Spectacles of Fencing, Bear-Baiting, Horse-Racing, and such other Games, no more like Stage-Plays, than a Huffing Gentleman is like an Humble, Meek Clergy-Man; or Ma-
lice

lice and ill Nature, like Wit and Learning. And for once I shall show this Critical Gentleman a Mistake he will not be able to defend. In his 250th Page he translates *Spectacula Secularia*, Stage-Plays; I thought Mr. Collier better understood the *Roman History*, than to mistake Shews that were to be acted but once in a Hundred Years for Stage-Plays, but it is his Mistake through all his Quotations. He gives us a very large one from *Tertullian*, but let us observe the Circumstance of the Matter, and we shall find it will do him no good at all; for *Tertullian* lived in the Time of *Septimius Severus*, Emperor of *Rome*, under whom was rais'd a Cruel Persecution against the Christians; in the Twelfth Year of his Reign were Proclaim'd the *Secular Plays*, (so called, because they were Solemnis'd but *Semel in Saeculo*, once in a Hundred Years) which Mr. Collier very learnedly mistakes for Stage-Plays; they were Dedicated to the Honour of several of their Heathen Gods: *Tertullian* conceiving it might breed great Scandal to the Christian Religion, if Christians shou'd Resort to them, Writes a Treatise, Exhorting all Christians to forbear these Shews, and uses many Excellent and Weighty Reasons to shew that these *Plays* were full of Idolatry and Superstition, and therefore they cou'd not go to see them, but they must become as Accessories and Partners with them in their Wickedness; That they were full of Licentious Beastliness; That Men and Women were brought in Naked upon the Publick Stage, using many Lascivious and Obscene Postures; That themselves were under Persecution, and fitter to Mourn than to be Merry; That their Afflictions called rather for Tears and Grief, than Joy and Laughter. Now what Divine among us wou'd not have Writ just as *Tertullian* did upon that Occasion? But how

Mr.

Mr. Collier can strain this against our *Stage Plays*, I cannot imagine; Is there the least Similitude betwixt them? But this Gentleman observes no Circumstances, if he can but rake Words enough he is satisfy'd, not minding if they are pertinent to his purpose. Mr. Collier reckons *Plays* among the *Pomps* and *Vanities* we have Vow'd against in our Baptism, but *Tertullian* says positively, *If there be no Idol in the Play, and Idolatry be not committed in it, then I charge it not with any renouncing which we made in Baptism.* And that it was none: But Heathen *Plays* the Fathers meant, we may find by the Words of St. *Cyprian*, *Quod Spectaculum sine Idolo? Quis Ludus sine Sacrificio?* All his Decrees of Council will be taken from him by the same Reason, for they were only meant of the Idolatrous Heathen Shews; the Decree that he Instances in, of the 3d Council of *Carthage*, plainly proves it, by mentioning particularly the *Speſtacula Secularia*, the *Sæcular Games*, and calling them *Pagan Entertainments*: His Quotations from Heathen Authors will not fare better than their Companions, for they cannot be imagin'd to relate to any thing but their own Heathen Shews. However, we will see presently if we have none of their Authorities on our side. But first I will assert that our Modern Poets, and especially the *English*, have excell'd all the Ancients in Theatrical Performances, They have cast off that unnecessary Clog the *Chorus*, which is manifestly for the better, thereby freeing their *Drammas* from many gross Absurdities. Our Moderns are not Guilty of speaking and Addressing themselves to the Audience in the midst of the Action, which is apt to cause such Confusion in the Spectators, that they cannot judge what belongs to the Play, and what does not; the Ancients were very frequently guilty of this fault. Their Plots were for the most part single,

single, without any Turns or admirable Surprises to delight or refresh the Audience; their Characters had no Variety of Humour, with which our *English* Stage so excellently abounds; when you see one or two of their Plays, you see all the different Humours of their Theatres, you are sure to meet with the same Covetous Old Man, the same Lewd Young Spark, the same Debauch'd Courtezan, and the same Saucy Slave in all their Comedies. Now how this shou'd constantly Delight, I know not; I am very sure it wou'd quickly be hiss'd with us; beside, it shews a very Narrow Conversation, or Observation, (for upon that Humour depends) in their Poets; and plainly proves a Fancy very Barren. With us you are differently Delighted every Day, you meet with Variety, you find something always New on our Theatres. This one thing alone will carry us far beyond any of the Ancients; and Mr. *Collier* himself must own, when any of our Poets have Chose the Subjects of the Ancients, that they have far surpass'd them; better Modell'd the Plot, and contriv'd the Incidents more surprising and admirable, nay and more probable too, have work'd their Thoughts to a greater Elegancy, and made the Turns more Nice, Easie, and Sublime, and their Characters, which were often Irregular, more Just, and Natural. We may easily prove what is here asserted, by only comparing our *Oedipus* with *Sophocles* among the *Greeks*, or our *Amphytrion* with *Plautus* among the *Latins*. If we have any regard to that Ornament to Learning, and Glory to his Country, Sir *William Temple*, we need argue the matter no farther; for Discourfing of *Drammatick Poetry* in his *Miscelanea* 2d. Part, he positively gives the Preference to the Moderns, denying that the Ancients can so much as stand in Competition with them.

I shall now endeavour at some Defence of Plays; and for this, I think I need not put my self to much trouble; for if we consider its Antiquity, its Usefulness, and the general Esteem and Encouragement it has met with in all Civiliz'd and Polite Nations, we cannot but agree in very Noble Thoughts of it. First of its Antiquity.

And here I might Trace its Original from *Thespis*, and shew its several Gradual Improvements by *Æschylus*, *Euripides*, and *Sophocles*, and from thence follow it to the *Romans*, who must own the *Greeks* to have been their Masters in this Species of Poetry; *Terence's* Comedies are hardly any more but bare Translations of *Menander*; and *Plautus* stands very much indebted to *Aristophanes*. But I shall wave this Head as foreign to my purpose, and not fit for the scanty limits of a Letter, which is grown too long already, and shall proceed to its Usefulness.

Which is so manifest, that I wonder any one can question it, who considers how well adapted it is to the Intentions of Human Life, Profit, and Delight. Who can express the Charms of a well wrought Scene lively Represented? The Motions of the Actor Charm our outward Senses, while the pleasing Words steals into our Souls, and mixes with our very Blood and Spirits, so that we are carry'd by an irresistible, but pleasing violence into the very Passion we behold. What Heart can forbear relenting to see an unfortunate Person, for some unhappy mistakes in his Conduct, fall into irreparable Misfortunes? This strikes deep into our Breasts, by a tender insinuation steals into our Souls, and draws a Pity from us; so consequently making us ready to assist all that we meet with in a like Condition: it teaches us to Judge Charitably of

the Miserable, when we see a small Error ignorantly committed, may be the cause of heavy Misfortunes: it teaches us at the same time Caution, and Circumspection in the Management of our selves. And who that sees a Vitious Person severely Punish'd, will not tremble at Vice? I think the *Libertine Destroy'd* cannot fail to put serious Thoughts into the most hardened and profligate Atheist, and rouse him from his Diabolical Lethargy, as powerfully as the loudest Denunciations from the Pulpit. Nor is Comedy without its Excellencies, which being a lower and more natural Representation than Tragedy, discovers to us the daily Affairs we meet with in the World; and if Tragedy scares us out of our Vices, Comedy will no less shame us out of our Follies. Tragedy, like a severe Master, keeps a heavy hand over us; but Comedy, like an indulgent Parent, mixes something to please when it reproves. Who can forbear blushing, that sees some Darling Folly expos'd? And tho' its ridiculousness tickles him into a laughter, yet at the same time he feels a secret shame for the Guilt. *Aristophanes* kept all the *Athenians* in Awe by his Satyr; a Person was no sooner guilty of a Crime in the City, but it star'd him full in the face on the Stage, and by this means he regulated the Commonwealth better than their greatest Philosophers with their empty Sophisms, or the Laws with their blunted edge. Comedy is also useful to instruct us in our Dealings in the World; when we see a Friend False and Treacherous, this teaches us to stand upon our Guard, and be very cautious whom we trust; when we see a Young Gentleman Ruin'd by the Subtile and Deluding Arts of some Cunning Courtezan, it bids us beware of the like Danger. The *Squire of Alfaria* gives more effectual Instructions to the Country Gentleman, for the avoiding his Ruin both in Person and Estate by the Town-Sharpers, by exposing their Shifts and Cheats, that the best Advice of the ablest

ablest Divines, Thus seeing of what Worth and Value Dram-
matick Poetry is, for the forming our Manners and regulating
our Lives, besides the great Delight and Pleasure it affords
us, I think I need not urge much more for its Recommen-
dation.

If we look back to Athens, we shall find that that
Learned Commonwealth took the greatest Care of their
Theatres, and that they spent more Cost in Adorning
and Decorating them, than they did in all their Wars.
Enripides, and *Sophocles*, were reckoned Equal, if - not
Superior to their Greatest Philosophers: Their Actors
were generally Persons of Good Birth and Education;
nay, sometimes we find Kings themselves performing on
their Theatres, and *Cornelius Nepos* in *Præfat. Vit.*
assures us, That to appear on the Publick Stage, was not
in the least Injurious to any Man's Character or Honour.
The Romans, tho' they did not respect their Stage equal
with the Greeks, yet had their *Ædiles*, Magistrates Chose
on purpose to Reward their Deserving Actors, and take
Care of the Theatres. *Macrobius* tells us in his seventh
Chapter, how *Augustus Cæsar* himself Rewarded *Liberius*,
and *Publius*, *Pylades*, and *Hylas*, four Players in Rome.
The Famous *Brutus* was not only a great Favourer of
Plays himself, but he writ to *Cicero* that he shou'd fre-
quent the Theatres. And *Pompey* the Great built a Thea-
tre at his own Cost and Charge. *Suetonius Tranquillus*
tells us of the very best of all the Roman Emperors,
Augustus Cæsar, That, *Spectaculorum, & assiduitate, & va-*
rietate, & Magnificentia, omnes Antecessit. In the Varie-
ty and Magnificence, and frequenting of Plays, he ex-
ceeded all Men. And the Famous *Cicero* says, *Et nosmet-*
ipsi, qui ab delectatione omni negotiis impedimur; & in

ipsa Occupatione delectationes alias multas habere possimus, ludis tamen Oblectamur, & ducimur. And in another place speaking of Plays, he says, *Delectant homines, mihi crede, ludi, non eos solum, qui fatentur, sed illos etiam qui dissimulant.* All People, believe me, are pleas'd and delighted with Plays, not only those that confess it, but those that dissemble and wou'd deny it; nay, then the Learned *Cicero* must be a Lyar, or good Mr. *Collier* a Hypocrite. It is moreover observable from the History of all Ages, that the Theatres are (if I may use the Expression) the Pulse of a Kingdom; by the Low or Flourishing Condition of the Former, you are certain of the Estate of the Latter, when the One is at its Height, the Other is at its full Glory; and when the One is Mean and Despicable, the Other is sure to be Poor and Low. And indeed I admire any one can have a Thought toward the Discouragement of any sort of Poetry, who considers how highly Poets were priz'd and esteem'd by the Ancients; the Great Emperour *Augustus* thought himself more happy in the Private Conversation of his *Virgil* and *Horace*, than when Deck'd with all his Royalty, and Seated on his Throne. The Fam'd *Scipio* and the Noble *Laelius* were proud when they Enjoy'd their *Terence*. And the Celebrated *Cicero* has thus spoke in their Praise. *Atqui sic a summis hominibus Eruditissimisq; accepimus cæterarum rerum studia, & Doctrina, et Præceptis, et Arte constare; Poetam Naturæ ipsa Valere, et mentis viribus excitari, et quasi Divino quodam Spiritu Affari; quare suo Jure nosse Ennius Sanctos appellat Poetas, quod quasi Deorum aliquo dono, et Munere commendati esse Videantur.* But it is time, to hasten to an end, I shall add but one saying more, from the Learned Sir *William Temple's Miscellanea* 2d Part, where speaking

speaking of Poetry, he tells us, *He that is insensible of its Charms, shou'd take care to hide it, that it is not known; for fear he bring in question his Good Nature, if not his Understanding.* And so I shall conclude with Subscribing my self.

S I R,

Your very Humble

Servant, &c.
